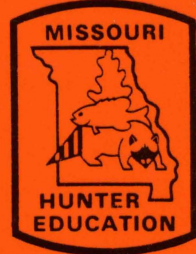


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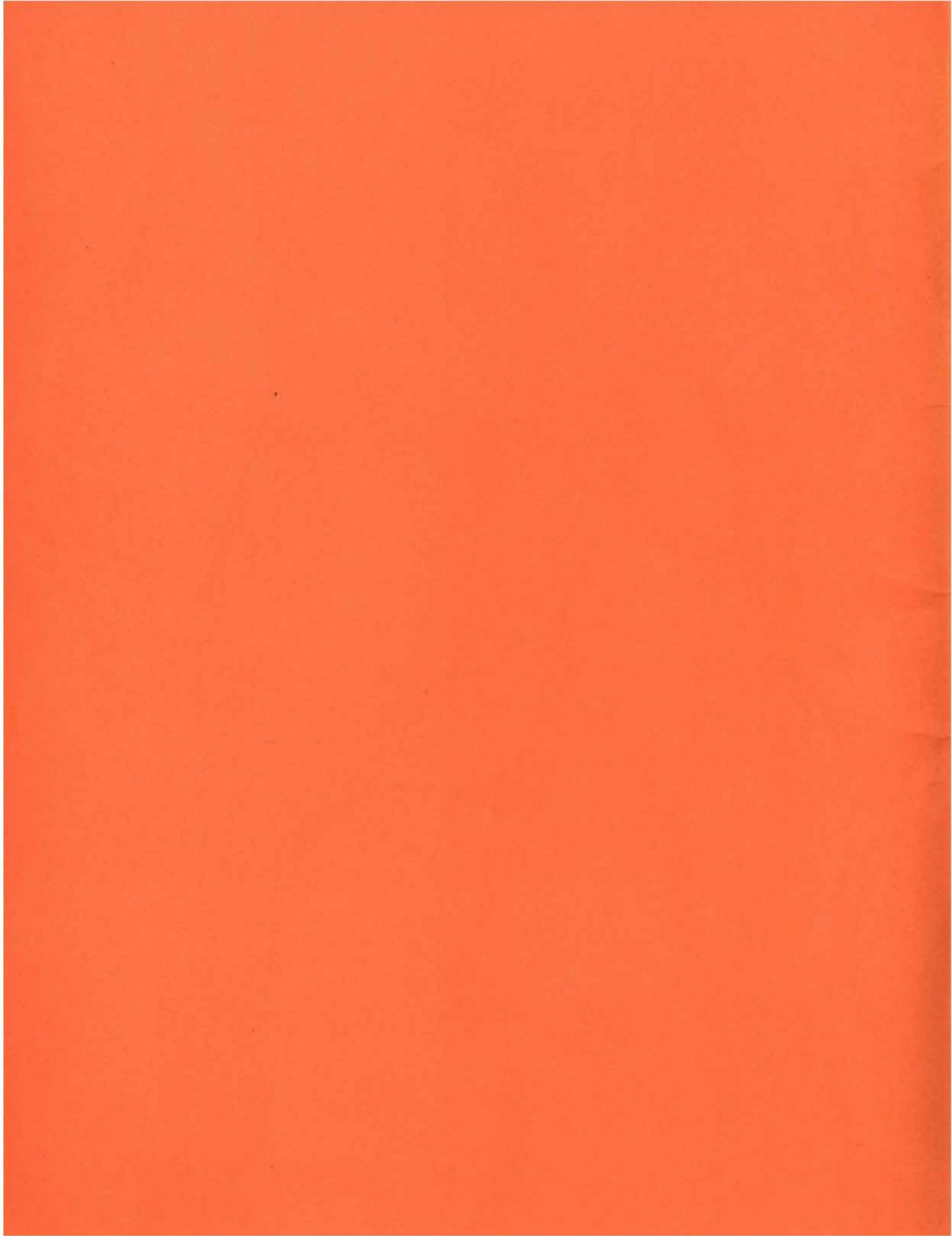
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Missouri Turkey Hunter Education Program



STUDENT MANUAL



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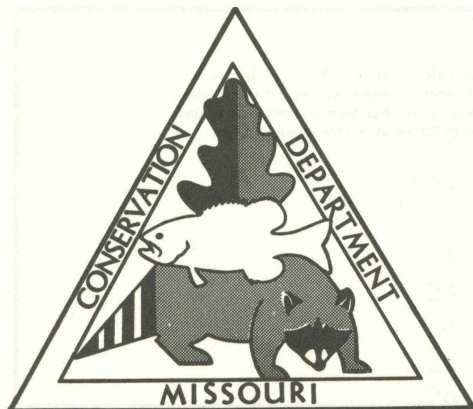
MISSOURI TURKEY HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
EDUCATION SERIES

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This material has been developed in cooperation with members of the Missouri Wild Turkey Federation and reviewed by Outdoor Skills Education Specialists and Biologists of the Missouri Department of Conservation.



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Introduction

Why do people hunt wild turkey in our state? Why do *you* hunt turkeys?

For food? When you stop and think about it, how much per pound does a wild turkey cost? A lot more than a store-bought one, doesn't it? The truth is, that while wild turkey is good to eat, we can't say (practically) that the main reason we hunt turkeys is for food.

There's an old saying that some people hunt in order to kill and other people kill in order to hunt. Hunting—calling and working the bird—is what the sport is really all about. *That's* why we're out in the woods—because the *challenge* of the hunt, the *risk* of failure, the *thrill* of success draws us back each season for more.

There are four main sub-species of turkeys in the United States: Merriam, Rio Grande, Florida and Eastern wild turkeys. Each of these has species-specific characteristics and behavior patterns. There is only one sub-species in Missouri—the Eastern wild turkey.

This manual will address the basic facts about hunting the Eastern wild turkey in Missouri. Topics covered will include the history of Missouri's turkey restoration effort, how to prepare for a turkey hunt, strategy for the hunt itself, different types of equipment available and how to use it.



Art by Paul Ticknor

History

As we discuss the world of turkey hunting in Missouri, keep in mind that turkey hunting seasons are relatively new to our state. Although our first turkey season occurred in 1960, the average turkey hunter today has less than five years of experience hunting turkeys.

We haven't always had a lot of birds. A simplified curve of the turkey population in Missouri since the turn of the 19th century would look like part of the roller coaster. The population was high, then declined sharply, and now is increasing rapidly.

As a result of the state's successful wild turkey restoration, turkeys recently have become more prevalent and turkey hunting has become increasingly popular. In 1975, the state had its first fall turkey season for archers. A fall gun season followed three years later. In the spring of 1985, approximately 75,000 hunters bought turkey hunting permits. Close to 35,000 hunters now participate in Missouri's fall shotgun season.

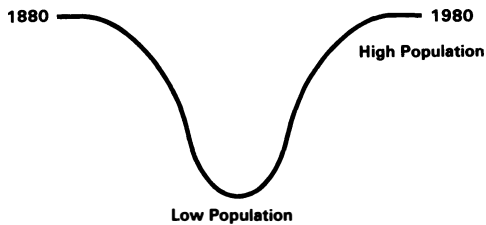
Turkey hunting also was popular with early Midwest settlers. In the early 1800s, Eastern wild turkeys were so numerous and easily obtained in Missouri that a dressed wild turkey then sold for 10 cents. During the next 100 years, the geographic range of wild turkeys reduced to only 30 Ozark counties. Turkeys in those counties suffered further as habitat destruction increased. Turkey habitat was destroyed by excessive timber harvest, overgrazing and repeated burning of the woods. In the early 1930s, the National Forest Service initiated a program to reduce forest fires, which included the birth of Smokey Bear.

But the turkey population continued to fall. In addition to habitat destruction, turkeys were faced with human predators—poachers. We can only speculate as to how many thousands of turkeys were lost to poachers during a time when control was difficult and spotty.

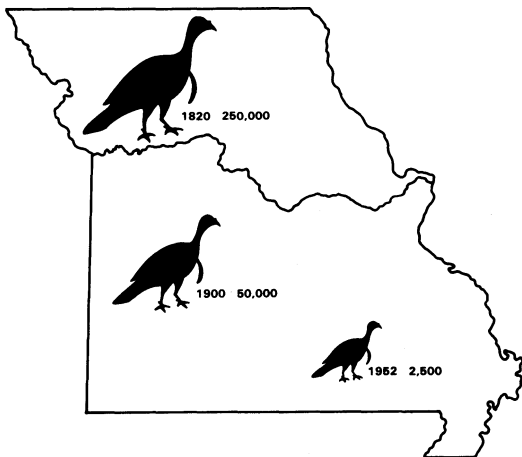
Even today, poaching has a big influence on our turkey population. Recent studies that have monitored turkey activity and deaths show alarming figures.

In a study on survival of turkey hens, conducted in North Missouri, researchers captured hens and attached radio transmitters to them so that they could determine when and how the birds died. Results showed that many hens were poached through the winter. However, the most extensive poaching of hens occurred during the spring gobbler season when nesting periods were delayed.

In some years, as many as 10 percent of the radio-transmitted hens have been shot during the gobbler-only season. The number of hens shot depends on the breeding stage of the hens when the spring season opens. More hens are shot if they are still moving with the gobblers when the hunting season opens.



**WILD TURKEY
POPULATION
DECLINE**



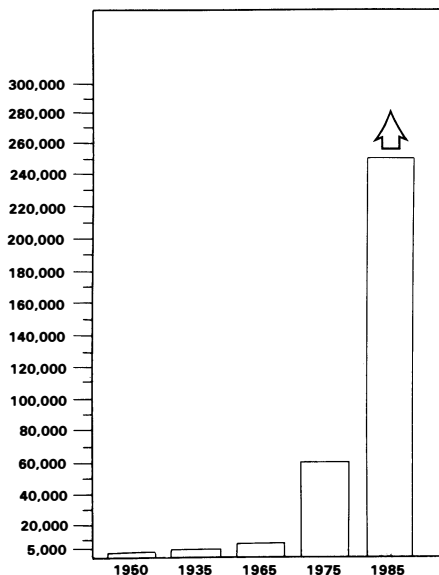
Operation Game Thief



Here is where you can help by reporting any suspicious behavior that could be illegal hunting. If you see or learn of a possible violation, call your conservation agent or the Operation Game Thief toll-free number: 1-800-392-1111. Operation Game Thief (OGT) is a program financed by the Conservation Federation of Missouri in cooperation with the Missouri Department of Conservation. Those who use OGT may remain anonymous and will receive a reward if an arrest or citation is made upon investigation.

Population trends

MISSOURI WILD TURKEY
POPULATION TRENDS



If you refer to the wild turkey population-trend graph for 1935 to 1965, you'll see that population was still low in 1950. In 1952, an estimated 2,380 turkeys lived in Missouri. There were less than 3,000 wild turkeys when the restoration program began in 1954. Today, Missouri's wild turkey population may well exceed 250,000 birds.

Initially, biologists thought they could increase the wild turkey population by releasing pen-reared birds to breed in the wild. In 1928, about 630 pen-raised turkeys were released to help a flock of about 4,000 turkeys. In 1929, another 646 pen-raised turkeys were released. By 1932, more than 1,500 pen-raised turkeys had been released in St. Charles and 40 other counties south of the Missouri River. But in 1935, the flock was estimated at 3,500 turkeys—less than before the 1,500 pen-raised turkeys were released.

Biologists began to realize that pen-raised turkeys have a difficult time surviving in the wild. Their ability to fight off disease and natural predation left a lot to be desired. This was why they began trapping and relocating *wild* turkeys.

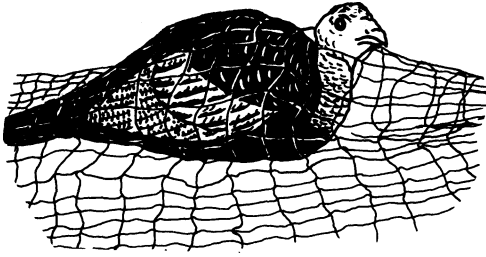
Relocation, Site selection

Initially, to qualify as a turkey release site, there had to be approximately 15,000 acres of private land available to the turkeys. Usually, that size of a site required the cooperation of several landowners. Each of the landowners had to agree to protect the turkeys.

One requirement of the 15,000 acres was that it be 70 percent forest and 30 percent open fields—which biologists believed, at the time, to be ideal turkey habitat. Since then, we have learned that the ratio of forest to open area isn't as critical as once believed. In fact, most of North Missouri has less than 30 percent forest, and that's where we see some of the highest turkey densities in the state. A 50-50 ratio of timber to open fields may support more than 30 turkeys per square mile.

A second requirement for an area to be considered as a release site was that it had to have a permanent water supply within one mile.

Trapping sites



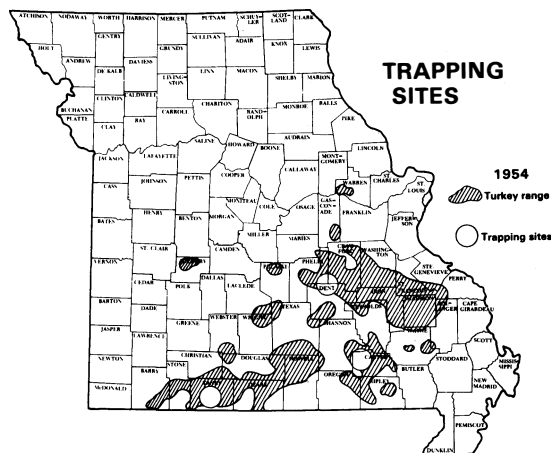
More than 200 areas were approved to be release sites since the state initiated the program in 1954. Turkey trapping sites used when the program started are shown on the map. Wild turkeys were trapped, using a cannon net, on these three general areas.

The cannon net is a net that is shot out above turkeys that walk in to feed at a bait site. It was developed at Swan Lake and originally used to capture waterfowl.

Between 1954 and 1960, turkeys were restocked in 11 Ozark counties. A normal release consisted of 12 hens and five adult gobblers. Between 1969 and 1970, they were restocked in 45 additional counties, including a few in North Missouri.

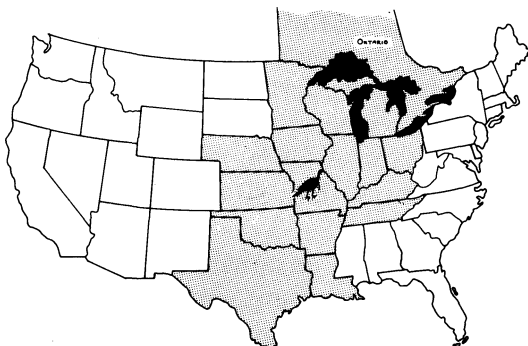
Between 1970 and 1980, turkeys were restocked in 36 more counties, plus additional relocation in the original counties.

The completion of the restocking program in 1979 was a milestone for Missouri. A total of 2,679 turkeys had been trapped and relocated in 91 counties in 213 locations. From those birds, we harvest about 20,000 birds each spring, and we have exchanged more than 1,000 turkeys with other states for various species.



Turkey trades

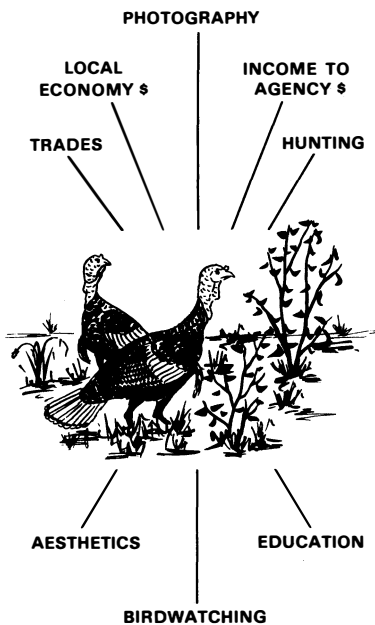
MISSOURI TURKEY TRADES



The restoration effort did more for Missouri than increase opportunities for turkey hunting and increase area commerce. By trapping and trading some of our surplus wild turkeys for wildlife from other states, we have secured the future of many other game species in Missouri. Trades with other states have included pheasants from Iowa; grouse from Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Minnesota and Wisconsin; otters from Kentucky, Arkansas and Canada; channel catfish, striped bass, muskie, pike, large-mouth bass and prairie chickens from other states.

Some hunters ask if removing these turkeys to trade with other states will lessen their own chances of bagging a turkey. The fact is, trapping is dispersed throughout the state and many of the sites are on wildlife refuges that are closed to hunting. In 1984, about 200 turkeys were captured from sites scattered in North and South Missouri. Obviously, this hardly put a dent in local populations.

Worth the effort?



From a financial aspect, can we justify the expense and effort it took to restore the turkey population to Missouri? You bet we can.

Since 1960, turkey tags sales have increased Conservation Department revenues by about \$16 million. Local economies also have benefitted—through the purchase of gasoline, shotgun shells, camouflage, calls and everything else associated with turkey hunting. Missouri turkey hunters spend almost \$10 million per year on incidental purchases related to the sport.

People who enjoy wildlife know you can't really put a dollar-and-cent value on the intangible benefits of securing wildlife populations. To them, the aesthetic value of seeing wild turkeys and other wildlife in their natural habitat is beyond measure.

For avid turkey hunters, though, restoring the turkey population to Missouri has meant the difference between a semi-annual foray into the woods to successfully bag a turkey or two, and possibly never having had the opportunity to do it even once in their lives.

Hunting trends

The first modern-day turkey season was held in 1960. It was a three-day affair in 14 counties with 698 licensed hunters. Ninety-four turkeys were killed.

In 1980, a 14-day season was permitted in 93 counties that had 55,565 licensed hunters. They harvested 16,720 turkeys. In 1985, all of Missouri's 114 counties were open to spring gobbler hunting. The number of turkey hunters has increased to approximately 70,000 in 1985, when a total of 24,770 birds were harvested.

Unfortunately, the large increase in numbers of hunters has contributed to an increase in hunting accidents and fatalities. The irony of it is: turkey hunting doesn't *have* to be dangerous. Assuming the proper attitude and taking simple precautions can reduce turkey hunting accidents to insignificance.

Turkey hunters

What kind of hunter are you? Do you have the proper attitude and take precautions when you're out in the woods?

Are you a turkey *killer*? Or are you a turkey *hunter*? There is a difference. A turkey killer relies primarily on luck and often roams the woods aimlessly, hunting turkeys as though they were quail. Such a person is dangerous. A turkey killer would like somebody else to scout for and find his turkeys. He'd like to rely on someone else to call the bird and

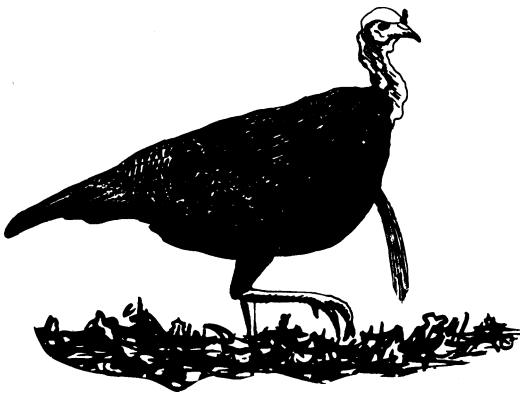
get it in close for him to shoot. He is, in effect, just a trigger-man.

Such a person misses out on one of the greatest thrills of turkey hunting: the pride that comes with knowing you, alone, met the challenge of woodsmanship—independently determined your own strategy, anticipated the bird's movement and timing, had fortune in your favor—and succeeded by bagging your own bird.

It helps to have a guide or experienced person with you when you're out for your first season. But by the second or third year, and by learning all you can between seasons and applying it when you're outdoors, you ought to be able to do some of the scouting and calling yourself—and learn first-hand what the sport is all about.

Let me offer you some tips now that will help you through those first times out, and may even add new perspectives to you old-timers who have been in the woods for many seasons.

Types of hunting



Missouri's turkey population has increased enough to allow both a spring and a fall season. Under current regulations, you can legally kill five turkeys in Missouri—two in the spring with a shotgun, two in the fall with a shotgun and one in the fall with a bow and arrow. The two turkeys taken during the spring season must be a male or have a visible beard to be legal. During the fall shotgun and archery season, turkeys of either sex may be taken.

Pre-hunt preparation

Whatever season you hunt, your preparation will be an important part of your success as a turkey hunter. The weeks you spend getting ready for the season will eliminate a lot of near-misses, mistakes and even accidents in the field. It's also fun to get your equipment ready, check it over and plan your hunt.

Each time you go out, you need to check your equipment and your calls. If you use a diaphragm call and haven't tested it since last year, the reed may have dried and split. Check and double-check your shotgun.

Selecting equipment

Shotgun selection is the first concern of most new turkey hunters. Choice of brand and action aren't usually as critical as which gauge will suit your needs.

Most turkey hunters use a 12-gauge shotgun. Very few use a shotgun smaller than 12-gauge, because it increases the

SHOTGUN CRITERIA

1. Gauge
2. Action
3. Choke
4. Barrel Length

chance of crippling. There are quite a few turkey hunters using 10-gauge shotguns, which is the largest legal gauge to use. Ten-gauges do have the advantage of more pellets, but the disadvantages of weight and recoil prevent a lot of 12-gauge hunters from using them.

A key point here is that you should strive to take your shot at less than 40 yards to ensure a clean, quick kill. It's hard to see a beard when the bird is more than 40 or 50 yards away in the brush, and the only *consistent* identifying characteristic of a legal turkey is the beard. Practice judging distances—depth perception in the woods can be misleading, especially from a low, crouched position against the base of a tree.

Using a 10-gauge to ensure a cleaner kill is okay, but it's a mistake to try to increase your range by using one. Shooting at a target at more than 40 yards in the woods is questionable at best, and shooting a firearm at a questionable target only leads to trouble. Besides, the real fun of turkey hunting is calling them in close.

Your choice of choke size may make the difference between a clean kill and a crippled bird. The most popular choke is the full choke, which gives you the tightest pattern. A tight pattern is important in order to strike the vital head-and-neck area to ensure a quick, clean kill.

Because research has shown that the length of the gun barrel (after the first 18 inches) doesn't affect pattern, more and more hunters are using shorter-barrelled shotguns, even down to 20-inch barrels. These are lighter and easier to carry and to swing in the brush.

AMMUNITION CRITERIA

1. Gauge
2. Shot size
3. Type of shot
4. Length
5. Powder charge
6. Shot charge
7. Manufacturer

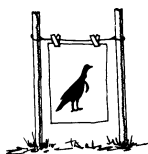
After you select your shotgun, consider which ammunition will work best for your gun and give you optimum performance. Most turkey hunters select copper-plated, buffered magnum loads to improve pattern density and penetration.

The best shot size for a turkey has been debated for years and it boils down to personal preference. The most commonly used shot sizes are No. 6s and No. 4s. It's best to pattern your gun with both sizes and select the load and shot size that patterns best in your particular shotgun. Some people feel shot sizes smaller than No. 6 may increase the chance of crippling a turkey because they can't penetrate the bird as well. Shot sizes larger than No. 4 aren't really necessary and can increase the severity of an accident because they travel and penetrate farther. Ballistic studies have also shown No. 2 shot to pattern erratically. *Missouri's regulations now prohibit shot sizes larger than No. 4 for turkey hunting.*

The best way to avoid crippling losses is to always work the turkey in close and avoid long-range shots, no matter what shot size or gauge you choose.

PATTERN YOUR SHOTGUN

Patterning your shotgun should be one of the first things you do to prepare for each season. Let's talk about the best



ways to pattern the gun so that you can best evaluate your results.

Always pattern your shotgun with the same ammunition you plan to use when hunting, because shot size and other shell components may vary with different brands and could affect your pattern.

You should also pattern the shotgun from the position you probably will be in when you shoot the turkey. This is because the position you are in can affect the way you hold the shotgun and this can change your point of aim. It's good to pattern your shotgun while sitting and while standing, so you get a feel for the different performances.

You should also wear the same clothes you'll wear when you hunt. A head net, hat and other clothes can affect the way you hold the shotgun. This is why patterning your shotgun should be a dress rehearsal of your planned hunt.

To pattern your gun, use a large piece of paper or cardboard at least 3 feet by 3 feet. A turkey silhouette roughly sketched on paper serves as a good target area. Commercially made patterning targets are available. (*See gobbler silhouette in back of manual.*) Next, secure a safe backstop.

Now, wearing all the gear and clothes you normally wear turkey hunting, and using the same shotgun and ammunition you plan to use hunting, back up 20 yards from your target. Get in the position you would normally use to shoot your turkey, aim at the turkey target and fire once.

Check your target, put up a new one and repeat the procedure until you have at least two reliable patterns each from 20 yards, 30 yards and 40 yards.

This will not only tell you how well your gun is patterning, but also will show you your most effective range.

If your shotgun pattern is too tight or too open, alter the choke (or simply adjust it if it's the variable type) or try another shot size and/or brand. If the shotgun consistently patterns too high, too low or too far to the left or right, an easy remedy is to put rifle-type sights on your shotgun barrel. This usually allows you to adjust your pattern up, down, left or right. Another recourse is to seek the help of a professional gunsmith.

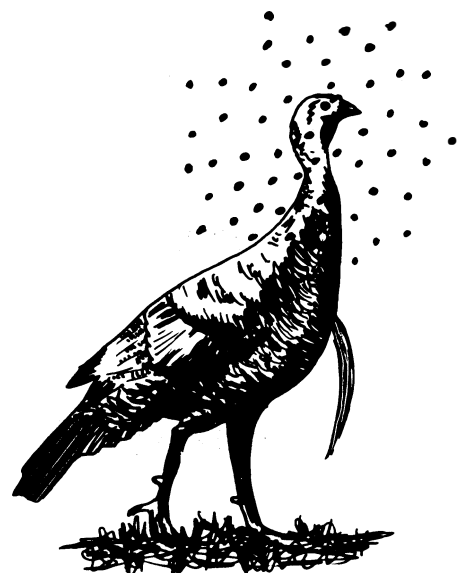
An effective pattern is a must to ensure clean, quick kills. A clean, quick kill results when shot penetrates the turkey's head and neck.

AIMING

A lot more goes into a quick, clean kill than knowing that your shotgun patterns well and shoots true. You should learn where to aim and when to pull the trigger.

Aim above the feather line, on the neck, above the waddles and below the beak.

It's best to shoot when the head is sticking up, rather than while the turkey is strutting with his head drawn in against his body. If you have a turkey strutting in front of you and you need to get him to raise his head up, call once—a short putt or cluck—and get ready to fire. Pull the trigger as soon as the head comes up—don't wait.



good patterning



BOW

One way to hunt turkey in Missouri that takes a lot of dedication and preparation is by bow and arrow. With a bow, practice is not only wise, it's essential if you want to bring home a turkey.

First, you should sight in your bow. It is just as important to sight in your bow as it would be to pattern your shotgun. You should aim at an area that is about the size of a silver dollar—at the junction of neck and body, where the wing meets the body. An accurate hit will break the backbone, one or both wings and your bird will not fly away.

Birds that are hit solidly but are able to flee can be difficult to find. String-tracking devices are excellent for pursuing wounded birds. A thin line, attached to the arrow, enables you to follow a bird that has fled up to 3,000 feet.

To improve the killing efficiency of the arrow, you want the sharpest arrow possible that will remain in the body of the turkey. If an arrow passes through a turkey, the turkey usually will die—but it may fly or run up to a quarter-of-a-mile or more before dying. Recovering the turkey then is difficult. An arrow that is inhibited from full penetration will generate more shock or impact and often will kill the turkey more quickly. Several commercial devices are available to attach to arrows to inhibit penetration.

TURKEY CALLS

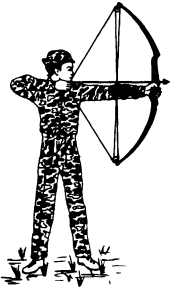
Whether you use a bow or a shotgun to hunt turkeys, the next important piece of equipment you'll need is your turkey call. Turkey calling strategy is the same for either type of hunting.

There are a variety of turkey calls on the market. Basically there are two types of calls—friction calls and air-operated calls.

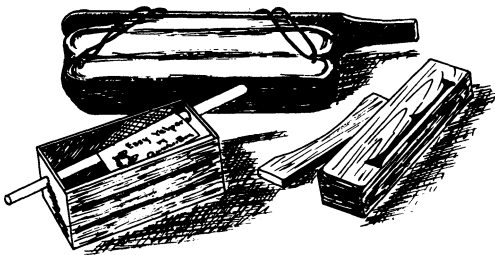
Friction calls are the most popular of the two. They have two surfaces rubbing together, creating friction that produces a noise. The box call is a friction call and is easy to learn how to use.

Another kind of friction call is the slate call. It has two pieces: a piece of slate and a peg to rub around on the slate. One disadvantage with a wooden peg is that you can't get a good sound if it's wet or raining. A piece of plexiglas rod instead of a wooden peg will work on a slate even when it's wet. It is easy to use and produces a realistic sound, even in a drizzling rain.

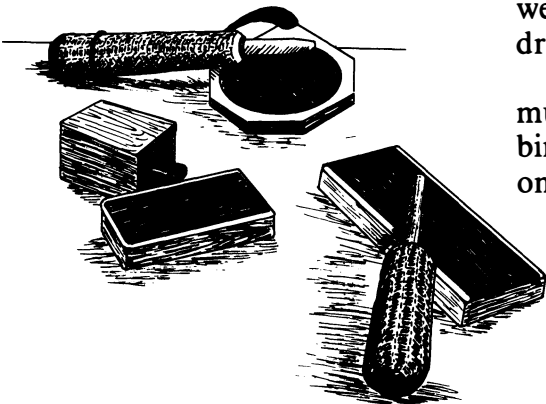
A major disadvantage of both friction calls is that you must use your hands to call. The movement may spook your bird, or he may be so close you really need to have your hands on the gun.



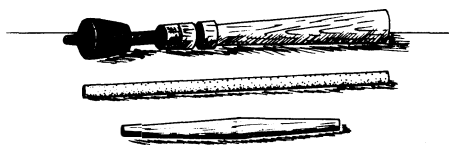
Box Calls



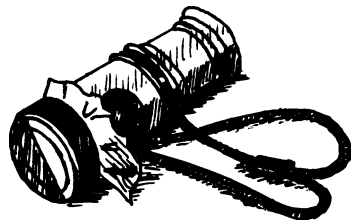
Slate Calls



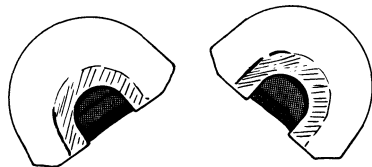
Yelper Calls



Tube Call



Diaphragm Calls



Air-operated calls create a noise when air passes through or over them. The three basic air-operated calls are the yelper, the tube call and the diaphragm call.

People use pipe stems, ball point pens, hollow reeds and even turkey wing bones to call turkeys. These calls produce sound when you suck on them.

Another kind of air-operated call is the tube call. It looks like a snuff can or a 35mm film canister with a piece of rubber stretched over it.

An air-operated call that's particularly popular is the diaphragm call. The diaphragm call has a big advantage over all the other types—you don't have to use your hands while calling. Also, you can make all the calls of a turkey on a diaphragm call. Disadvantages are that they tend to be fragile, so they won't last as long, and they are small enough to be easily lost. They also require more practice to master.

A diaphragm call is made up of a small metal frame shaped like a horseshoe, with one, two, three or four pieces of rubber reed stretched across the opening. Each reed will be slightly shorter than the one above.

The number of reeds and the thickness of the reeds determine the tone and volume of the call. If it has a single reed, the sound is a clear, unraspy call. If the reeds are very thin, it makes a high-pitched sound. With two reeds, the call is a little more raspy. Three reeds make it raspier still. Notches or slits cut in the reeds will make the call even more raspier.

Keep in mind while you practice on these diaphragm calls that they sound different to you than they would to a turkey at a distance. A good way to tell whether you sound right is to record yourself on a tape recorder.

ACCESSORIES

Once you have your calls in hand and can practice until you master them, you'll begin to think about what other equipment you'll need for the hunt.

You can carry all kinds of useful accessories: a knife, a camera, a compass and topo maps, a blind, a cord or rope, a first aid kit . . . And, of course, don't forget your turkey tag!

A piece of cord is helpful when you carry the bird out of the woods. The gobbler's spurs can be sharp, and they are hard on fingers if you carry the bird over your shoulder by holding his feet. Tie the feet together and your bird will be easier to carry. Don't forget to wrap an orange vest or sash around the body of the turkey.

STAY WITHIN LIMITS

When preparing for a turkey hunt, don't neglect your most important piece of equipment yourself.

Hunting turkeys can be physically demanding. Sitting behind a desk all year and then running up and down hillsides after turkeys for two weeks can lead to injuries, heart attacks and other problems. Prepare yourself both mentally and physically and you'll have a much more enjoyable turkey season.

The key to hunting is to learn the limits of your physical abilities and your equipment. Once you've learned them, don't push them. Stay within those limits and you'll be a safer, more successful turkey hunter.

The safety factor is becoming increasingly important as turkey hunting continues to increase in popularity. As it increases in popularity, so does hunting pressure, or the number of people hunting in a given area at the same time.

Turkey regulations

Some state regulations are intended to more evenly distribute hunting pressure. In Missouri, opening the season on a Monday and restricting the bag limit to one bird per week both help to reduce the number of hunters in the woods at a given time.

Other regulations have been set with the safety of hunters in mind. Regulations restricting hunters to the use of shotguns and to shot size no larger than No. 4 were put into effect to reduce accidents that occurred because ammunition was dangerous at a distance farther than you could see. Also, accidents involving smaller shot are much less likely to be fatal.

A new regulation was implemented during the 1987 Spring Turkey season. This regulation required hunters to remove a "peel-off" yellow sticker from their permit and affix it to the receiver of their shotgun. This small yellow sticker had the words "Be Safe" printed on it. The idea behind the sticker was to remind hunters of safety at the crucial moment they start to sight down the barrel.

Turkey hunting regulations sometimes change from year to year, so be sure to familiarize yourself with them each year. Another part of pre-hunt preparation is to learn the location of your check station and to know the area regulations before you ever get out to the field.



Safety

Questionable safety in the turkey-hunting woods is one of the few reasons an experienced turkey hunter might have for feeling uncomfortable with the sport.

Turkey hunting accidents have reached an alarming and unacceptable level. Of course, any accident is tragic, but right now, *spring turkey hunting is the most dangerous sport in the United States involving a firearm!*

One possible reason for accidents is the misconception many people have of the bird's mentality. The turkey often is incorrectly portrayed as a "super bird." Its ability to avoid the hunter gives some people the impression that the bird can't be fooled. Some hunters think that in order to get their birds, they will have to shoot the first chance they get. Because they don't take the time to take precautions before they pull the trigger, these hunters often are the ones responsible for hunting accidents.

Actually, the alert and cautious bird is merely a product of its environment. To survive, he must avoid being eaten by coyotes, bobcats and other predators. He is born with a limited amount of instinctively cautious behavior, which



Art by Paul Ticknor

increases with age as he learns and responds to dangerous stimuli from his environment. The more near-fatal encounters he has, the more wary he becomes.

The point is not to confuse the bird's *wariness* with his *intelligence*. Turkeys do not have reasoning powers; therefore, you can't describe them as intelligent. They are best described in relative terms as cautious and wary.

Part of the safety problem also stems from people who want to get a turkey so bad that they risk making a mistake. They feel 90 percent sure that what they're about to shoot is a gobbler, so they shoot before they've had a chance for *positive identification*—only to find out that that flash of movement was a person. Hunters must think before they shoot—there's not a turkey anywhere that's worth a human life or human injury.

We can tell you about incident after incident where one hunter has shot another person because he thought the movement or flash of color was a turkey. In 1985, there were 21 accidents during the spring season, in 1986, there were 31 accidents—even though the common range at which they shot was less than 40 yards.

Hunters are supposed to identify a beard on the gobbler before they shoot, yet many of those hens we talked about—the ones Missouri biologists equipped with radio transmitters—were killed during the spring gobbler season.

All of these hunting accidents could have been prevented if the simple rules of safe gun handling and positive identification had been followed.

Carefully select the colors you wear in the woods during turkey season. Studies undertaken during deer seasons have proven that wearing the hunter-orange color reduces accidents in the field. Turkey hunters, however, generally have shied away from wearing hunter orange because they believe turkeys spot it.

For this reason, in 1982, the Missouri Department of Conservation embarked on a three-year study to determine whether wearing hunter orange had any effect on turkey hunter success.

The first year, volunteers used a hunter-orange alert band that they wrapped around a tree or wore draped across their chest. The second year, volunteers wore a full hunter-orange vest and the third year, they wore a hunter-orange camouflaged vest.

The study yielded no conclusive evidence whether turkeys are affected by hunter orange. Some of the volunteers who used hunter orange did harvest gobblers. A key point to remember is that it's almost always movement, not color, that spooks turkeys.

To humans, small patches of orange can look almost red in low-light situations. If you choose to wear hunter orange, wear something at least as big as a vest and not something as small as an armband, which could be mistaken for the small patch of red on a gobbler's head.

If you choose not to wear hunter orange while working a gobbler, at least wear it when you are entering or leaving the woods or when moving around during the hunt.

Colors that should never be worn in the turkey woods are red, white, blue and black. Other hunters associate these colors with the gobbler. Black looks like the body of a bird. Red, white and blue are colors of a gobbler's head.

Even the distribution of the camouflage you wear can make a difference whether you are confused with a gobbler. The most common type of spring turkey hunting accident is one which the victim was mistaken for a turkey and shot. Almost without fail, the victim is wearing some sort of camouflage. Camouflage itself does not cause the accidents, but wearing it improperly can and does contribute to accidents.

Camouflage does *not* make you invisible, but conceals only the parts of you that are camouflaged. A person who wears only partial camouflage may be concealing just enough of his body to make the visible parts look like those of a turkey.

A shiny cheekbone, a shiny or light-colored gun stock or action, part of a T-shirt, tops of socks, handkerchiefs, hands, boots and boot soles are all items that, when left exposed, can lead to accidents.

If you choose to wear camouflage, be thorough. You want an approaching hunter to see *all* of you, or *none* of you.

The tone of colors you'll want to wear will depend on the time of year and where you will be hunting. Camouflage tones for spring in Missouri will be a little greener than the browns you'll want to wear for fall hunting.

Almost any item of clothing or other turkey hunting gear is available commercially in camouflage. You also can make your own.

Turkey safety tips



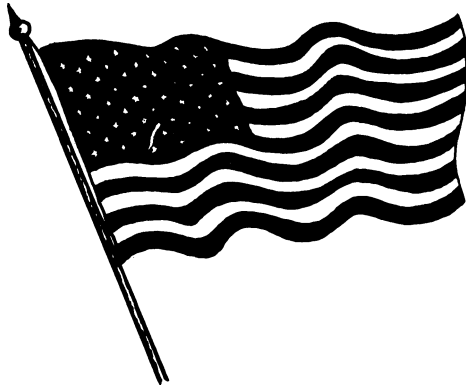
PRACTICING SAFETY

Remember and practice at all times these three basic rules for firearms safety:

1. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
2. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
3. Always make sure the firearm is unloaded and the action is open except when actually hunting and always leave the safety "on" until just before you take the shot.

PREPARING FOR THE HUNT

Safe handling of firearms is a prerequisite to a safe hunt. Attend a hunter education course in your area. Whether you are 6 or 60, you can learn something new by attending one of these programs. Turkey hunting seminars sponsored by the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Wild Turkey Federation are conducted around the state each year. Missouri Law now requires all persons born on or after January 1, 1967 to complete a hunter education course before purchasing a hunting permit.



Always pattern your shotgun before you go hunting. This allows you to learn the range and pattern of your shotgun and gives you some practice judging distance.

DRESSING APPROPRIATELY

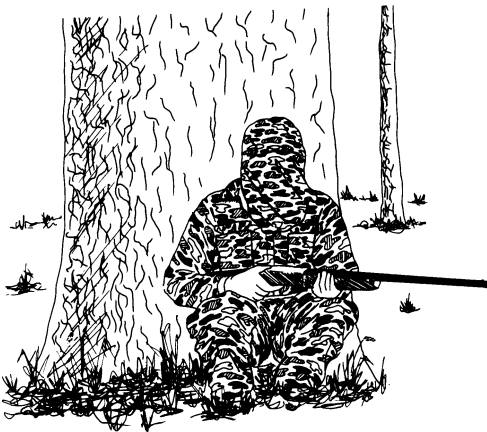
Never wear red, white, blue, or black in the turkey woods. These colors are associated with the wild turkey and can contribute to victim-mistaken-for-game accidents, the most common type of turkey hunting accident. Learn to dress defensively and remember that partial or improper camouflage can be just as dangerous in the turkey woods as is red, white, blue, or black. Always wear fluorescent orange when moving for any reason in the turkey woods.

CALLING

Never use a gobble call during the hunt. A gobble call may draw other hunters into your area and lead to a dangerous encounter.

CHOOSING A CALLING POSITION

To reduce the chance of being injured by another hunter, sit at the base of a tree which has a trunk wider than your body. This way you can see an approaching hunter and you are protected from the rear. Choose a call position from which you can see well. Do not hide in a blow down or thicket which may make it difficult for other hunters to see you and keep you from verifying an incoming bird as a legal target.

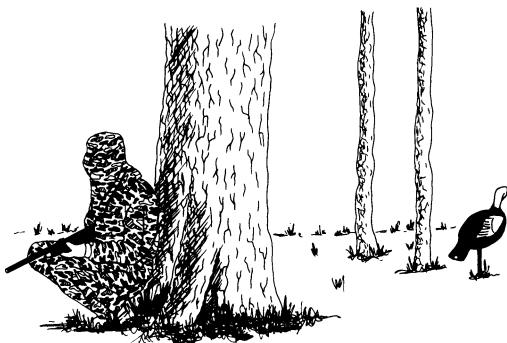


APPROACHING "OLE TOM"

Never try to sneak up on, or drive wild turkeys toward another hunter or cut between a caller and a turkey. Always call the turkey to you. The less moving you do, the safer and more effective you'll be.

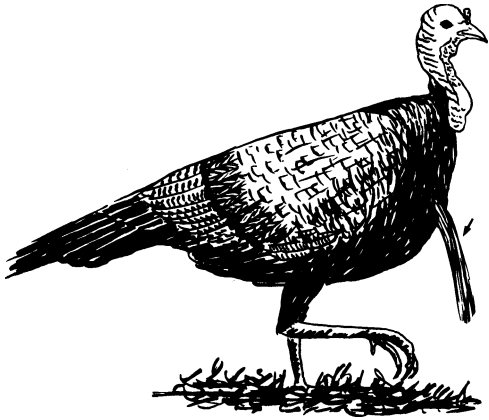
USING A DECOY

Some turkey hunters choose to use a hen decoy when hunting. If you use one, always place it so you are out of the direct line of fire should another hunter shoot at it. In a wooded setting, make sure a large tree or trees shield your position from the decoy. If you're in the open, face the decoy directly toward you or away from you, so it is most visible to approaching hunters out of your direct line of fire. Always carry your decoy in a bag or backpack so it will not be mistaken for a live turkey by another hunter.



SIGNALING AN APPROACHING HUNTER

Never wave, whistle, or make turkey calls to alert an approaching hunter to your presence. Always shout to reveal your presence to an approaching hunter. Never assume you are the only hunter in the area. Assume every sound or movement is another hunter until you can safely identify it as otherwise.



IDENTIFYING YOUR TARGET

The most critical moment of any turkey hunt is when you decide to pull the trigger. **Be absolutely sure that the bird you see has a beard. This is the ONLY positive means of identifying a legal bird under all conditions.** Never use noise, movement or color to confirm a legal bird in your mind. A person walking in the woods can sound like a turkey. Color can certainly be deceiving, particularly in poor light. Remember the cardinal rule and repeat it to yourself—**See a turkey beard before you shoot.** Never let excitement, nerves, panic, or peer pressure guide your behavior. Always strive to remain calm and rational. **Remember, there isn't a turkey in the woods worth a human life or injury.**

LEAVING THE WOODS

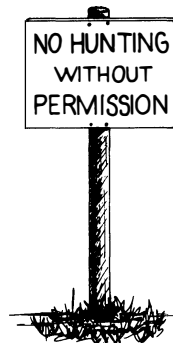
If you shoot a turkey or have merely decided to quit hunting for the day, unload your shotgun. If you have shot a turkey, tag it immediately and wrap an orange vest or band around its body with its wings folded in. Then walk out of the woods using the most visible route you can and remember to always wear fluorescent orange when you are moving.

These hunting tips are not regulations. They are merely suggestions to increase your safety in the turkey woods. You may know other techniques that add to your enjoyment and safety. Use them all. Nothing is worth the tragedy of an accident.

Once you are comfortable with safety guidelines, you are ready to begin looking for a place to hunt.



Locating a gobbler



Always ask permission before you scout for turkeys on private property. Landowners often know where the turkeys are. In the winter they are flocked and can be very visible. The farmers see them in fields and hear them gobbling, so they usually know where the turkeys feed and roost. You can increase your chances of finding them by talking to the landowner.

You also can get out early in the morning and drive the county roads to scout and listen for birds. Hearing the gobblers is the best sign because you know turkeys are in the area.

Normally, you can scout by listening for gobblers as early as March in Missouri. If warm weather comes early in the spring, turkeys may begin active gobbling in February.

It helps to have a topographic or county map that you can write on to mark where you have found birds. Mark more than two locations, because there are many unexpected variables you'll encounter when it comes to opening day. You need to find as many turkeys as you can in different places and mark each location on your map.



Scouting

What constitutes a good place to hunt turkeys? An area that turkeys are using, of course. Whether you hunt on public or private land, you will have to do some scouting to find out where the turkeys are.

Second, a good place to hunt is in a terrain that you know how to hunt. Sometimes the lay of the land seems to work against you, but more often than not it's just a matter of knowing the territory and manipulating the bird so that the landscape can work for you. Always note the location of either man-made or natural barriers, such as fence lines, streams, impenetrable thickets or swamps that could deter an approaching turkey.

The turkeys will know the country too, and they'll be using it to their advantage. If you know basic hunting strategy, can be quiet and motionless, can hit a target with your shotgun at 30 yards and can yelp a couple of times using a turkey call, you still can beat the turkey on his own home territory.

Turkey hunting requires the same general skills as squirrel hunting. The biggest difference is that you use a call to lure the turkey closer to you. But you don't have to be an expert caller—some real, wild turkeys don't sound like anything you've ever heard.

Most people agree that finding the right place to hunt and knowing how to hunt account for 75 percent of your chances for success. Seeking a good place to hunt is one of the most important steps. If there were 50 gobblers, they all must have a place to roost, so find out where they are. In Missouri you can begin scouting in February, and should be feeling good about what you've seen as the weather turns warm the first part of April.

THREE BASICS OF TURKEY HUNTING

- 1. A good place to hunt**
- 2. Knowing how to hunt**
- 3. Knowing how to use equipment**

(1. and 2. make up at least 75% of your success factor.)

TURKEY SIGNS

The most important time to scout is during the two weeks just before the season starts. Then, you'll be noting signs that turkeys are using a specific area.

Look for tracks along roads and trails, plowed fields, creek bottoms, and other places where the ground is soft.

If you do find turkey tracks, it won't make a difference whether the tracks were made by a gobbler or by a hen (gobbler tracks are bigger), because you will know there are birds in the general area. If there are hens in the area, there's a good chance in the middle of April that there will be gobblers there, too.

Don't limit yourself to only looking for turkey tracks. A track is the most obvious sign, but it isn't the only one to look for. Keep your eyes open for droppings, dusting areas, scratchings, roosts and feathers.

A heavy concentration of droppings under trees can tip you off to roosting areas. It's best to know exactly where the gobbler is roosting—if not the tree, at least the general area. Also, by being familiar with the area, you can select a good position from which to call. Being near the roost on opening morning may give you an added advantage.

You also can find droppings wherever turkeys feed. A gobbler's droppings usually are long and shaped like a "J," while a hen's droppings usually are small, amorphous masses (blobs). Once again though, if one sex is there, the other will be there also.

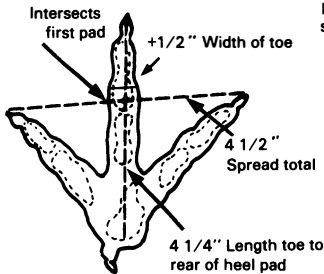
Dusting areas are found mostly in the summer and are an important sign to look for when you're scouting for the fall season. You won't find dusting areas during wet spring weather. Birds flock to dust in the same spot, which makes it easier for you to see the sign. Often, birds will dust themselves near the edges of cultivated fields, sandy streams or creek bottoms.

Scratchings are another good sign to look for and can be found about anywhere in the woods. If leaves are turned over and the ground is still moist, birds are using the area. Old scratchings that have dried are not reliable signs that turkeys are still in the area. With just a little bit of experience, you will be able to distinguish between fresh scratchings and abandoned ones, and you will be able to tell the direction the turkeys were traveling. The leaves will be piled directly behind a scratching turkey, indicating the direction of travel.

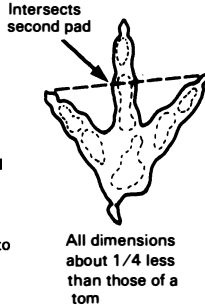
Feathers are another sign that turkeys are in the neighborhood. Often, you'll find feathers where gobblers have been fighting. Because gobblers in the spring do quite a bit of fighting to establish dominance, they will lose some feathers. The black-tipped feathers you see are the breast feathers of the gobbler. The hen's feathers are buff-tipped or brown.

TURKEY TRACKS

Gobbler track

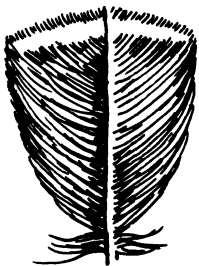


Hen track



FEATHERS

Female



Male



Success factors

Once you have found sign that turkeys are regularly in an area you plan to hunt, you have significantly increased your chances of having a successful turkey hunt. There are many

other factors that will affect your chances for success. You'll even find that you'll have control over some of them.

Weather conditions have a big influence on your ability to hunt successfully. If you have the patience to sit in rain, you can still call a turkey to you. In a pouring rain, turkeys are hard to hear and they have a hard time hearing you. A drizzle, however, can be one of the best conditions in which to hunt because most of your competing hunters go home where they are dry. Windy days are the worst because the turkeys can't hear you, nor can you hear them.

Other hunters can also have a big effect on your chances for success. Let's say that by the week before turkey season, you have scouted for and pegged three gobblers on a ridge in a convenient location—plus you've even found a good place to park. Thinking you have the birds in the bag, you go home, excited about the first day of hunting season. Opening morning comes, you drive to the woods and it looks like a used car lot. If you decide to hunt those birds now, you risk being the victim of an accident. Plus, the presence of other hunters decreases your own chance for success. Because you never know how many other hunters you will be sharing your woods with on opening morning, it is important for you to have more than one good spot to hunt.

The time of day you hunt and the number of hours you spend afield will affect your chances for success. Many people believe you have to be out in the woods before dawn to kill a turkey. Most turkeys are killed before 8 a.m.

Most people leave the woods by 10 a.m., with or without a turkey. If you have the patience to stay late, you'll have less hunters in the woods competing for your gobbler. Also, late in the morning, gobblers may be more responsive to your calls because the hens have left to sit on their nests.

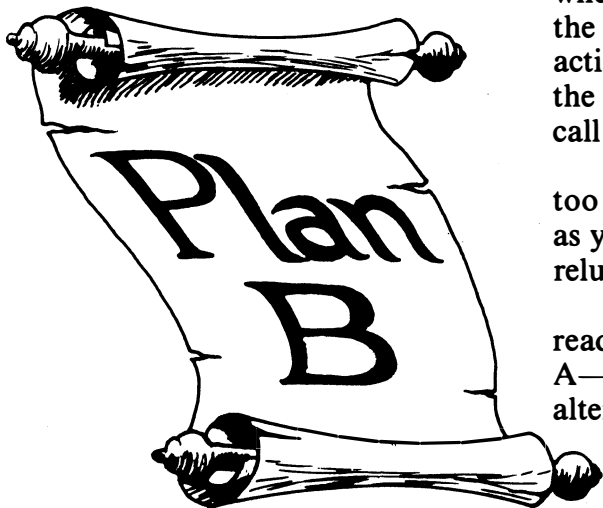
An important success factor is formulating a good game plan. When you devise a game plan, consider everything—where and how you'll call and the probable approach route of the gobbler. Go through the hunt in your mind. Visualize your actions and try to anticipate the behavior of the turkey. Know the area you are hunting in. Remember, turkeys are hard to call across well-travelled roads or water, or through fences.

When picking a place to call from, be careful not to hide too well. You want to be able to see all around you and as far as you can, so you can see approaching hunters. Turkeys are reluctant to approach a thicket that they cannot see into.

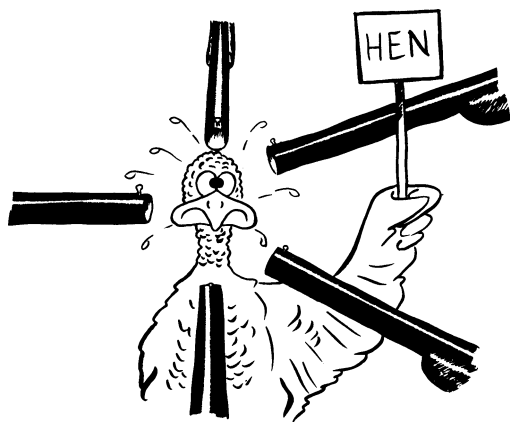
Probably the biggest success factor is having Plan "B" ready when Plan "A" fails. Very few turkeys are killed on Plan A—most are taken as a result of alternative plans. Having an alternative plan can put the odds in your favor.



Art by Paul Ticknor



The hunt



Art by Paul Ticknor

Not developing a plan and an alternative plan could be the biggest mistake you make in preparing for the hunt. To walk aimlessly through the woods during turkey season, hoping to come across an unsuspecting turkey, is dangerous and foolish. You're relying strictly on luck to find a bird. Your movement decreases your chances of getting a wild turkey and increases your chances of being the victim of an accident.

You should buy a turkey call and learn to use it. Never go to the turkeys; call the turkeys to you.

It's amazing how many hunters come in to a hen call. Every year, more and more hunters complain about calling in other hunters. Unless you're using a gobble call, there's no good reason for someone to come in to you. Nobody is supposed to be hunting hens in the spring.

Moving toward a hen call can only hurt you. You may spook birds you can't see. More important, chances are too great the hen call might be another hunter, sitting on ready, waiting for that rustle of leaves and movement in the brush to become the gobbler he's been waiting for.

Don't be so naive as to think you can tell the difference between a real hen call and a human imitation. Don't risk going toward the sounds you think are being made by a real hen.

If you hear a hen, you may choose to try to call her in to you on the chance she'll bring a gentleman friend with her. If you hear a hen call and a gobbler answer, then you can begin to call the gobbler. He may go to you first, or mark your location and come to you when he's finished with the hen. The point is, don't move to them or try to get between them. Walking in on a hunter and a gobbler is the most dangerous situation you can put yourself into.

We often hear the question, "Will a gobble call attract gobblers?" The answer is, "Yes, in some situations a gobble call may attract a gobbler ready to fight for dominance—but in *every* situation it may call in another hunter."

The time to use the gobble call is as a last resort, when nothing else will get the turkeys to respond by gobbling. But remember, if *you* haven't heard any gobbling, neither has anyone around you. So, if you gobble, you're attracting the full attention of nearby hunters—just what you *don't* want to do.

Using the gobble call in the evening to locate birds is fine, or before or after the season, but it's wise to avoid using it during legal shooting hours of the spring turkey season.

Getting him to gobble

There are several ways to get a turkey to gobble. You may even provoke a gobble by slamming a car door as you leave for the woods—but doing that on purpose is more likely to spook a bird than to induce a gobble.



Working a gobbler

You may not wish to use a coaxing hen call before legal shooting time because you don't want the turkey to come to you yet. You just want him to gobble so you can locate him.

In the early morning hours, hooting like a barred owl causes their natural enemy, the turkey, to sound a warning gobble. The barred owl is the one who seems to say, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?" Barred owls love to sound off and let the world know they're there. If you can't hoot with your voice, you can buy owl hooters that you simply blow. Later in the morning, you can try a crow call. Often, a crow will incite a turkey to gobble.

If you hoot like an owl or caw like a crow, a turkey will gobble without coming in to you. He will just sound off to let you know where he is, and then you can get into position without giving yourself away. This also is good strategy to use when you scout before the season starts. Hooting and cawing may get him to gobble without making him look for you. If he comes in to a hen call and finds you instead, you may have created a call-wise bird that will be harder to lure the next time you try.

Once you have located a gobbler and placed yourself in a strategic location, your next challenge will be to get the gobbler to come to you. By using the calls that you have practiced, you will convince him that you're the hottest thing around and that he should high-tail right over to you.

Variations of the yelp are the most frequently used calls of the turkey. It may be just a single yelp or series that goes on and on for as many as 30 times. Most spring turkey hunters yelp three, four, five, six or seven times—turkeys can't count, so it's not critical how many times you yelp. Get it to come out strong and clear.

Rhythm is important, though. In fact, it is the most important part of turkey calling. When a turkey is born he comes out peeping with a rhythm. If you get the rhythm, it won't matter whether you are raspy or smooth or using a double- or triple-reed or a box call. If you don't have rhythm in your calls, you'll have trouble coaxing turkeys in to you.

If you can't remember the sound and rhythm of turkey yelps, get a record or tape and listen carefully. Barnyard turkeys are also good to listen to because their calls closely resemble a wild turkey's call. The hens will stand around and yelp just like their wild counterparts in the woods. If you learn to sound like one of them, you can call in a wild gobbler.

Another type of yelp is a tree yelp—a very soft yelp that should be used when the gobbler is still on the roost. Turkeys hear much better than humans. Before the hen comes off the roost, she calls softly. After you get in position, try giving a tree yelp while the gobbler is still on the roost.

Another handy call to use is the cluck. Turkeys frequently cluck while feeding and moving around undisturbed. You can make the clucking sound on any of the calls. This is also one of the easiest calls to learn.

COMMONLY USED SPRING CALLS

yelp	whine
tree yelp	gobble
cluck	spit & drum
cackle	lost call
cutting	others
putt	

The cackle is a series of excited yelps that hens sometimes make as they fly down from the roost. If you can't cackle well, don't do it at all. The fly-down cackle of the hen has been called the true mating call. It sounds just like a yelp, except it gets faster and faster as she pulls off the limb and flies to the ground, then tapers off and slows down as she lands.

You can learn to cackle with most of the turkey calls available. Another cackle is the assembly cackle made in the fall when the hen calls in the young poults. It's just a slowed-down version of the regular cackle.

Cutting is a sound turkeys make that is similar to the cackle. Cutting consists of excited, fast, short, sharp yelps and are frequently made by adult hens.

The purr is the contented, soft call of the hen. Purring and clucking are the calls that will bring turkeys in the last few yards.

The putt is a sound both sexes make, and may be either soft, intermingled with purrs and clucks during contented chatter, or it may be a series of hard, short, loud succession of putts which serves as the alarm call.

Most people say, "You should never putt; it will scare them off because it's the alarm call of the turkey." That's not true; turkeys putt frequently as they move and feed. Just be sure to get the rhythm and volume correct, so you don't sound the alarm.

The whine is a soft, high-pitched, drawn-out call of the hen, usually used in combination with putts and clucks.

The gobble of the male turkey can be imitated with your tongue and voice, a box call, a diaphragm call, or a shaker-type of call designed specifically for gobbling. Beware of gobbling during legal shooting hours, because you might attract other hunters.

Gobblers also spit and drum (or thrum) while displaying for the hen. The drum sounds like a giant rubberband vibrating in the woods. It is a very soft call. If the drumming gobbler is hidden by brush, it can be difficult to pinpoint his location.

The lost call or assembly call is a series of pleading yelps that tend to get louder and more pleading. Both turkey hens and gobblers use this call. This makes the lost call or assembly call a good call to use late in the morning.

Other calls include the brood hen's assembly call, the kee-kee run and the lost call. The kee-kee is the whistle of a young bird. The kee-kee run is the voice of a young turkey changing from a whistle to a yelp and is usually heard in the fall. The assembly call is used by the hen to call in her poults after they've separated from each other, and the lost call is used by an adult of either sex who is looking for company.

Stubborn gobblers

Sometimes you can use every call in the book, and you still have trouble getting the gobbler to come in those last few critical yards. He hangs up just out of sight and gun range. He still responds to your calls and seems to come in closer—but about the time you think he should be appearing, he doesn't.

STUBBORN GOBBLERS

Stimulus-Response

1. Rhythm
2. Loudness
3. How often

This is a tough problem to solve, as each turkey and each situation is different. One possible reason for it may be that there may be a physical barrier, such as a woven-wire fence between you and the turkey. Or, another hunter or predator may have caused him to abandon you for the moment. Or, you may have called too loudly. Generally speaking, turkeys only call loud enough to be heard by another turkey. When your call is too loud, the gobbler assumes the hen is close, and he begins to strut and display for all the world—and particularly you—to see. Unfortunately, he stopped just out of your sight and range.

Try muffling your call, or turning your head to project the call behind you, and the gobbler may move closer, reacting to the hen who sounds like she's moving away from him. Be *patient*—you may be able to wait him out. Eventually the hens will leave and your periodical calling will start working on the gobbler's mating urges. Patience and perseverance will usually prevail.

How often and how loud you want to call will vary with the situation and will come naturally to you with more experience. The key is to keep the turkey interested. If he loses interest, he may move out of the area or go to another hen or calling hunter. Remember, he responds to stimuli, and to lure him in, you must emit the strongest seductive stimulus interacting with him.

Spooking a gobbler

Long before you see the gobbler, he may see you. If you have chosen a good position and have camouflaged yourself effectively, he may look directly at you and not realize he's in danger. Your slightest movement, though, will spook him.

If the gobbler spooks and runs or flies away, don't move on immediately. Take a moment to try to figure out what spooked him. It may have been another hunter, a predator, or something you did. If it was something you did, you may learn something from the experience.

In any case, remain alert and confident. There may be another unspooked gobbler nearby. And, never assume that a spooked bird cannot be called in later.



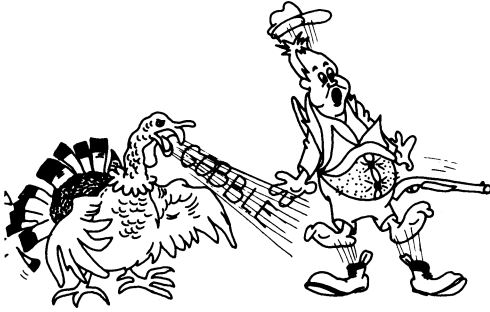
Prior to shooting

Even though you sense that you've got a bird coming in to range, remain perfectly still. Many people make the mistake of releasing the safety and putting their finger on the trigger too soon. They risk spooking the turkey by early movement, or worse, accidental firing.

Try not to get too excited when a gobbler answers your call. When the bird appears, first identify it as a legal turkey. Wait until the turkey moves his head behind a tree before you raise and aim your gun. Look beyond the turkey before you release the safety and shoot.

Gobbler fever

How many of you have heard of, or experienced, buck fever? Well, you can get gobbler fever just as easily in the turkey woods. The excitement of finally seeing that bird



you've been working the whole morning become your turkey as it moves toward you, and then seeing that 11-inch beard—it's enough to get your adrenalin pumping to the point where your excitement is the very reason you miss your shot.

The best way to avoid gobbler fever is to get out in the woods before the season and get used to the terrain and the bird. State parks that don't allow hunting are a good place to hone your skills. Take your camera instead of your gun and get some good pictures before the season.

And when you're back in the woods during the season, waiting for that gobbler to appear, don't get in a hurry to put your finger on the trigger. If you move cautiously, carefully and deliberately, you'll find you'll have plenty of time—and a greater chance of hitting your mark.

Wounded bird

Once you've shot your turkey, he probably won't immediately fall still. Wild turkeys don't normally drop over dead, even when they've received a fatal shot to the head and neck. They flop around on the ground, flapping their wings. As long as his head and neck is down, you've got him. If he's flopping around and his head comes up, you had better get ready to shoot.

People get excited and when the turkey starts flopping over the ridge, they jump up and go charging down the hill after it. In their excitement, they forget the gun's safety is off and their finger is on the trigger. Don't risk a fall by madly chasing the turkey. Take a few seconds to chamber another round in case you need it and put the safety *on* before going after a cripple.

Recovering the bird

Be careful how you retrieve a dying bird. It's better to let him finish flopping and lie still, completely dead, before you try to pick him up or tag him. The spurs on an adult gobbler are sometimes more than an inch long. They are sharp and can cut you badly. As long as his head isn't up, he is not going far. If his head is up, you may have to shoot him again, but shoot him in the head, not in the body. Even with a good head shot, he may flop around a little, but don't fear that you will lose him. It's better to put your foot on a flopping turkey's head to restrict his movement than to try to grab a flapping wing or foot.

Safe transport

Once you have him in hand, be careful how you carry him out of the woods. If you harvest a small deer, would you throw it over your shoulder to carry it out of the woods? Probably not, because someone might mistake you for a deer and shoot you. If you were to kill a turkey, how would you get him out of the woods?

Most people carry the turkey over their shoulder. Dressed in camouflage clothing, the hunter blends well with the woods. The warm, freshly killed bird is limp; its wings drop down and its tail fans out. This, combined with the fact that a person and a turkey sound much alike when walking through the leaves, adds up to an extremely dangerous situation.

An orange alert band, wrapped around the bird to keep its wings from flopping, helps make your walk out a safer one. If you don't want to make or purchase an alert band, try using an orange hunting vest. A little precaution may keep your bird from being shot a second time—and you with it.

Field dressing

Some hunters prefer to dress their turkeys before they leave the field. This is usually done by cutting a 2 inch to 3 inch opening in the body cavity near the anus and removing the entrails. The heart, liver, and gizzard should be put in a plastic bag if you want to save them. Dressing your bird in the field allows the body to cool down rapidly, and generally enhances the flavor of the meat.

Post Hunt Activities

Cleaning the Turkey

Many new turkey hunters are stumped when it comes to cleaning the turkey. Actually, they are just like any other fowl, such as ducks, geese, chickens or pheasants. There are two main methods of cleaning turkeys—plucking and skinning.

You pluck a turkey the same way you would pluck a chicken or any other fowl. The advantage of plucking is that you leave the skin on, which helps retain moisture in the meat during cooking. The disadvantages are that it takes more time than skinning, and it's messier.

Skinning a turkey is faster and cleaner, but in order to keep the meat moist, you need to wrap the turkey in foil or put it into a baking bag during cooking.

There are many methods of skinning a turkey. Here are the steps for one way:

1. Hang the turkey by both feet at chest level. The turkey should hang so the feet are 12 inches to 18 inches apart.
2. If you want to save the beard, remove it now. The best way to remove the beard is to grasp it as close to the body as possible, give it a half-twist, then sharply pull it away from the breast. The beard will pull away with a little tissue on it. Never *cut* the beard off if you plan to save it.
3. Now remove the fan by cutting the skin away from the tail.
4. Cut off the wings at the elbow or second joint.
5. Grasp the skin at the tail and begin pulling it down. Work the skin off around the wings and pull it down to the neck.
6. Cut off the neck and the skin. The feathers and head will come off in one piece.
7. Open the body cavity and remove the entrails, if you have not already done so in the field. Be sure to remove all lung material from the backbone, as it tends to spoil rapidly.
8. Cut off the legs at the knee, or second joint, and the turkey is ready for cooking or freezing.

Trophies

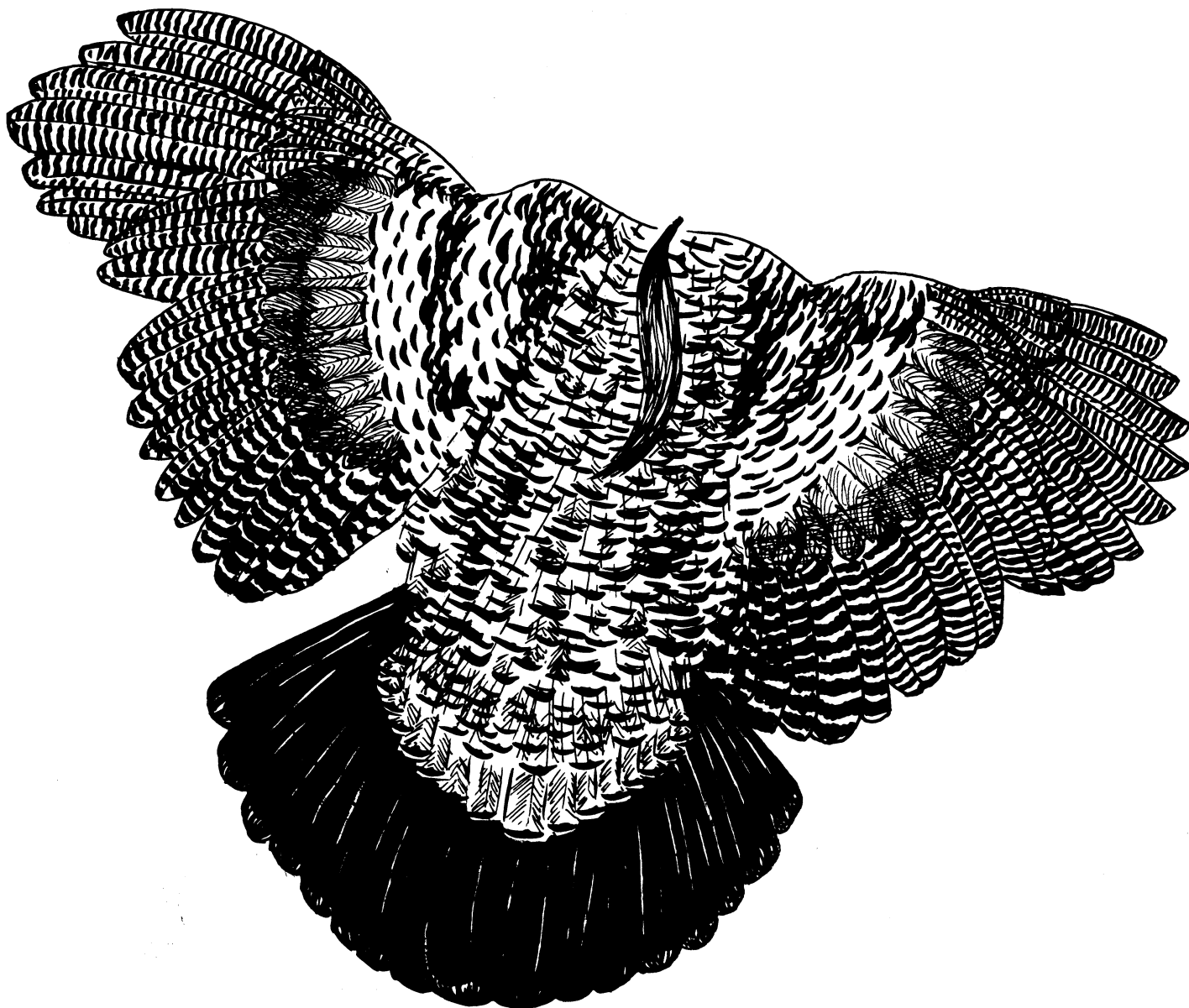
The wild turkey is a beautiful bird and can be mounted in many different ways, enabling you to enjoy the memories of your hunt indefinitely.

The beard needs no special treatment to be displayed. The fan should be spread out and pinned to cardboard or Styrofoam. Sprinkle salt and Borax on the fleshy part of the tail. Allow the fan to dry for several weeks and it will remain fanned out. The fan, in combination with the beard, makes an attractive trophy.

A taxidermist can mount the full body of your turkey in a strutting, standing or flying position, or just about any way you desire.

If you wish to preserve your own mount, open the skin along the vertical side with head, tail, wings and feet attached. Salt the skin and stretch it over a gallon jug to dry. Spread the wings and fan in a flying posture.

To protect your turkey mount from moths, rub Borax into the feathers.



Cooking the turkey

Editor's Note: *Turkey recipes taken from "Cy Littlebee's Guide to Cooking Fish and Game"*

Roast Wild Turkey in White Wine; Mushroom Pate Stuffing
Pate Stuffing (amounts are for 10–12 lb. bird)

1/4 cup butter or margarine
2 medium onions, chopped
1 cup chopped mushrooms (about 1/4 lb.)
2 qt. fresh white bread crumbs
1/4 tsp. pepper
1/4 cup finely chopped parsley
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. dried thyme leaves
1 tsp. dried marjoram leaves
1 lb. chicken livers, finely chopped

Ingredients for basting and later use:

1 T. salt
1 tsp. pepper
1/4 cup olive or salad oil
1 small onion, sliced
1 clove garlic, halved length-wise
2 whole cloves
1 bay leaf
1/4 tsp. dried basil leaves
1 can (10 1/2 oz.) condensed chicken broth, undiluted
1/2 cup white wine

In hot butter in skillet, saute onion and mushrooms until onion is tender—about 5 minutes. Turn into large bowl. Add chicken liver, bread crumbs, parsley, salt, thyme, marjoram and pepper; toss lightly until thoroughly combined.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Wash and dry turkey very well inside and out. Mix salt and pepper; sprinkle part of mixture inside turkey. Spoon stuffing into neck and body cavities; close cavity with twine, and fasten wing tips to body with twine. Tie ends of legs together. Place turkey, breast up (omitting rack) in a deep roasting pan with tight-fitting cover. Brush with oil and sprinkle with remaining salt and pepper. Roast uncovered 30 minutes, or until lightly browned.

Remove from oven; reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees F. Insert meat thermometer in inside of turkey thigh at thickest part. Add onion, garlic, cloves, bay leaf and basil to roasting pan. Pour chicken broth and wine over turkey. Cover pan tightly. Roast, basting every 30 minutes, for 2 1/2 hours, or until thermometer registers 185 degrees F. Leg joints should move freely. Remove turkey from roasting pan; remove twine. Let stand 30 minutes, then refrigerate, covered, until well chilled—overnight. Serve cold, garnished, slicing across both breast and pate stuffing in thin slices.

Easy to Handle, Easy to Cook and Easy to Eat Wild Turkey:

Cut turkey up as for frying. Place in salt water for about

30 minutes. Drain and place in refrigerator to thoroughly cool until each piece is very firm.

Remove and season each piece with pepper, a small amount of salt, and just a wee bit of powdered ginger. Roll in flour, making sure to cover completely.

Place each piece in a large iron skillet or heavy baking dish which has an ample amount of salt-pork drippings. Cover only partially to prevent soginess, and brown in oven.

After turkey is golden brown, remove from oven, drain (save drippings) completely as possible. Rearrange turkey pieces, have ready three-fourths cup of diced onions. Spread over turkey pieces. Place lid on and return to oven at about 325 degrees F. Cook slowly about 3 1/2 to 4 hours depending on size. If dressing is used instead of onion, this can be made in the usual manner, but should be completely cooked before spreading over the turkey pieces about 1/2 hour before removing from the oven.

This allows enough time to take some of the meat drippings to make gravy. Remember—this is SALT PORK drippings, so be cautious about seasoning your gravy.

Turkey In A Sack:

Grease a brown paper sack inside with melted shortening (use a sack of the right size to fit your bird); also brush turkey with melted shortening and salt and pepper well. Make a dressing and add oysters or mushrooms and stuff your bird. Then put the turkey in the bag and twist the end and tie with a string. Set sack in a pan and back in a moderately slow oven (325 degrees F.) 25 minutes per pound for total roasting. When done, take out of oven and do not open sack for at least 20 minutes, as this lets the steam go into the bird. Then open and serve. You will have a lovely brown bird. The paper sack will not catch on fire.

Baked Wild Turkey:

Wash dressed turkey and salt inside about 1/2 hour before stuffing. When stuffed place in baking pan—breast up—with about 1/4 inch of water in bottom of pan. Bake at 425 degrees until breast is lightly browned. (If cloth is used it is wise to dampen it several times during baking.) Reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake about 1/2 hour per pound. Add water to bottom of pan if dried up.

Simmer giblets and neck with 1 bay leaf, a stem of celery and small onion about 1 hour. Use this liquid for making gravy. Giblets will be good and tender to eat, too.

Camper's Cover Skillet Turkey:

Cut turkey in pieces, fry until brown with butter, margarine or shortening. Drain off excess fat. Add one cup onions, chopped fine, one cup mushrooms, pepper, parsley if wanted, one can of beer. Push back on the back of fire and let cook about 45 to 60 minutes at low heat.

Barbecued Turkey:

Cut turkey up in pieces, sprinkle with garlic juice or garlic salt, salt, add together:

One stick butter or margarine
1/2 cup chopped green onions or chives
1/4 cup lemon juice
1 T. thyme and savory, mixed
1 cup of broth
3 T. parsley

Cook onions until tender in butter, add other ingredients. Bring to a full boil, cover each piece of turkey with this mixture. Baste often on grille, cook 45 to 55 minutes or until done. If rotisserie is used, it takes about one and one-half hours until done.

Oven Fried Turkey:

For each pound of wild turkey, blend 1/4 cup flour, 1 tsp. paprika, 3/4 tsp. salt, 1/8 tsp. pepper, and 1/8 tsp. poultry seasoning (optional) in a paper bag. Shake turkey pieces, 2 or 3 at a time, in bag to coat evenly, brown in at least 1/2 inch layer of fat in a heavy skillet. Place golden-browned turkey pieces, one layer deep, in a shallow baking pan. For each 2 pounds of wild turkey, spoon a mixture of 2 T. of melted butter and 2 T. of broth or milk over the turkey. Continue the cooking in a moderate oven (350 degrees F.) until the turkey is tender. Test with fork. If fork penetrates easily, turkey is done. Turn once to crisp evenly. During the cooking, broth or milk may be drizzled over the turkey if it appears dry.

Conclusion

Always remember that the true joy of turkey hunting is the hunt itself and not the kill. The success of a turkey hunt is measured by the enjoyment of being outdoors and the challenge of calling and hunting the wild turkey. The actual harvest of a wild turkey is an added bonus.

Always practice safe gun handling and good sportsmanship and ethics while afield. Your actions and attitudes reflect on hunters in general. Be courteous to other hunters and landowners. And most important—*positively* identify your target before you pull the trigger.

Good luck, and have a safe, enjoyable turkey season.



10 Tips For A Safe Turkey Hunt

The Missouri Department of Conservation wishes you a safe and enjoyable hunt. If you follow a few simple safety tips, your hunting will be safer and more enjoyable. Ethical behavior, coupled with hunter awareness, is the key to the safe pursuit of the most majestic of all game birds, the wild turkey.

1 Practicing safety



Remember and practice at all times these three basic rules for firearms safety.

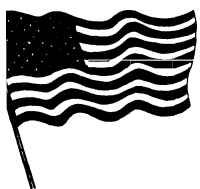
1. Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
2. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.
3. Always make sure the firearm is unloaded and the action is open except when actually hunting and always leave the safety "on" until just before you take the shot.

2 Preparing for the hunt

Safe handling of firearms is a prerequisite to a safe hunt. Attend a hunter education course in your area. Whether you are 6 or 60, you can learn something new by attending one of these programs. Turkey hunting seminars sponsored by the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Wild Turkey Federation are conducted around the state each year. Missouri Law now requires all persons born on or after January 1, 1967 to complete a hunter education course before purchasing a hunting permit.

Always pattern your shotgun before you go hunting. This allows you to learn the range and pattern of your shotgun and gives you some practice judging distance.

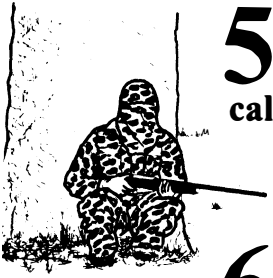
3 Dressing appropriately



Never wear red, white, blue, or black in the turkey woods. These colors are associated with the wild turkey and can contribute to victim-mistaken-for-game accidents, the most common type of turkey hunting accident. Learn to dress defensively and remember that partial or improper camouflage can be just as dangerous in the turkey woods as is red, white, blue, or black. Always wear fluorescent orange when moving for any reason in the turkey woods.

4 Calling

Never use a gobble call during the hunt. A gobble call may draw other hunters into your area and lead to a dangerous encounter.



5 Choosing a calling position

To reduce the chance of being injured by another hunter, sit at the base of a tree which has a trunk wider than your body. This way you can see an approaching hunter and you are protected from the rear. Choose a call position from which you can see well. Do not hide in a blow down or thicket which may make it difficult for other hunters to see you and keep you from verifying an incoming bird as a legal target.

6 Approaching "Ole Tom"

Never try to sneak up on, or drive wild turkeys toward another hunter or cut between a caller and a turkey. Always call the turkey to you. The less moving you do, the safer and more effective you'll be.

7 Using a decoy

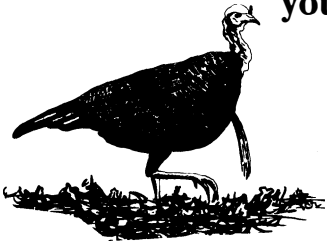


Some turkey hunters choose to use a hen decoy when hunting. If you use one, always place it so you are out of the direct line of fire should another hunter shoot at it. In a wooded setting, make sure a large tree or trees shield your position from the decoy. If you're in the open, face the decoy directly toward you or away from you, so it is most visible to approaching hunters out of your direct line of fire. Always carry your decoy in a bag or backpack so it will not be mistaken for a live turkey by another hunter.

8 Signaling an approaching hunter

Never wave, whistle, or make turkey calls to alert an approaching hunter to your presence. Always shout to reveal your presence to an approaching hunter. Never assume you are the only hunter in the area. Assume every sound or movement is another hunter until you can safely identify it as otherwise.

9 Identifying your target



The most critical moment of any turkey hunt is when you decide to pull the trigger. **Be absolutely sure that the bird you see has a beard. This is the ONLY positive means of identifying a legal bird under all conditions.** Never use noise, movement or color to confirm a legal bird in your mind. A person walking in the woods can sound like a turkey. Color can certainly be deceiving, particularly in poor light. Remember the cardinal rule and repeat it to yourself—**See a turkey beard before you shoot.** Never let excitement, nerves, panic, or peer pressure guide your behavior. Always strive to remain calm and rational. **Remember, there isn't a turkey in the woods worth a human life or injury.**

10 Leaving the woods

If you shoot a turkey or have merely decided to quit hunting for the day, unload your shotgun. If you have shot a turkey, tag it immediately and wrap an orange vest or band around its body with its wings folded in. Then walk out of the woods using the most visible route you can and remember to always wear fluorescent orange when you are moving.



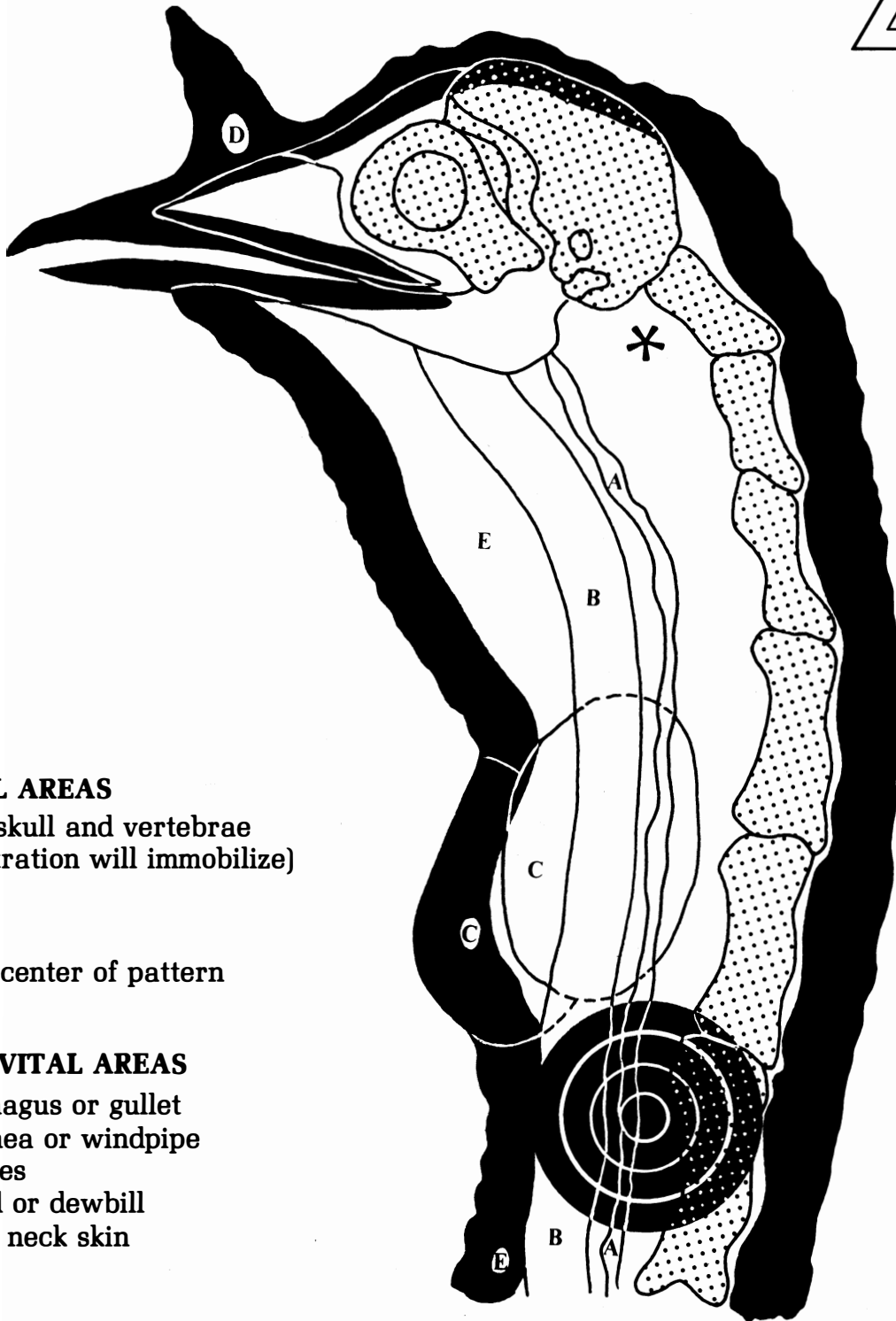
If you see a wildlife violation, call Operation Game Thief




These hunting tips are not regulations. They are merely suggestions to increase your safety in the turkey woods. You may know other techniques that add to your enjoyment and safety. Use them all. Nothing is worth the tragedy of an accident.

GOBBLER PROFILE

Help make turkey hunting
a safer sport —
Test your shotgun pattern
on this actual size turkey head



VITAL AREAS

 Bony skull and vertebrae
(Penetration will immobilize)

 Ideal center of pattern

NON-VITAL AREAS

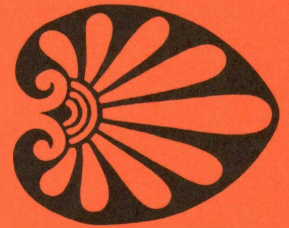
- A Esophagus or gullet
- B Trachea or windpipe
- C Wattles
- D Snood or dewbill
- E Loose neck skin

*Feel free to make copies of
this for you and your friends.*





REWARD



Operation Game Thief pays cash for information
leading to arrest or citation on wildlife law violations.

**Poachers are thieves — don't
let them steal from you!**



If you suspect violations, call
your Conservation Agent or dial

1-800-392-1111

toll-free, anytime. Anonymously.

